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SUBJECT: TENSIONS SIMMER BETWEEN ANBAR,S GOVERNOR AND THE
PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2795

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 1047

[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 932

[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 457

[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 433

[1](#)F. BAGHDAD 400

[1](#)G. BAGHDAD 142

[1](#)H. 07 BAGHDAD 2229

Classified By: PRT Team Leader James Soriano for
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

Summary

[1](#)2. (C) Long submerged tensions between the Provincial Council (PC) and Governor Ma'amoun surfaced in Ramadi September 9, with a threat to remove Ma'amoun from office unless he improves essential services. Published minutes of a PC meeting record that the governor risks a vote of no confidence if performance does not improve within a month. Such a move is unprecedented in recent memory. Two factors seem to be behind the rift. The first is the PC's search for a meaningful role in the post-conflict period: the PC has typically been deferential to Ma'amoun's strong-willed style, and is uncertain of the boundaries of executive and legislative authority. The second factor is the rivalry between the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), which controls the PC, and its chief opposition, the Iraq Awakening Conference. Many IIP partisans suspect that Ma'amoun, who has IIP roots but is nominally non-partisan, is moving closer to the Awakening, keeping his options open in provincial elections. Thus the no-confidence threat is the IIP's way of brandishing its clout. Ma'amoun has been absent from Ramadi; his reaction to the PC's move is still unknown. End Summary.

Political Tensions

[1](#)3. (C) Anbar Province has received positive press coverage recently with the reduction in violence, the transfer of security responsibility to the Iraqis, and the general return to normal life. But the good news ought not to obscure the fact that like other parts of the country, Anbar is rife with deep tribal and political factionalism. Such tensions have always been present (reftels), but rose to the surface this past week with a public rift between the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), which controls the Provincial Council (PC), and Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed.

[1](#)4. (C) At a September 9 PC meeting, Council members sharply criticized Ma'amoun for alleged mismanagement and "disregard" for the PC's decisions. The governor was not present at the session, but PC member and leader of the province's branch of the IIP, Ashour Hamid Salih, laid down a marker: unless Ma'amoun becomes more responsive to the council's decisions, he risks removal from office. The exchange was the first time PRT observers had heard such sharp criticism of the

governor at a PC meeting.

List of Complaints

15. (C) During the meeting, Chairman Abdulsalam Abdullah, an IIP insider on the national scene, read from a letter he received from several PC members containing a list of complaints about Ma'amoun. Abdulsalam did not identify the authors, but he summarized the letter's contents from the podium. Many of the grievances appear trivial, but include: the governor has allegedly appointed directors general (DGs) without authority; he has not properly overseen their work; he has allegedly mismanaged police affairs, education, and the distribution of fuel; and he did not consult the PC, as directed to do so, before signing on Sept. 1 the memorandum of understanding on the transfer of security in the province.

16. (C) The rift has made national news. Baghdadi TV picked up the story and ran a streaming news ticker quoting Abdulsalam as saying that the council has made "suggestions" to the "executive" on improving services. Abdulsalam did not name the governor by name. However, the PC's website, (www.alanbartoday.com), pulled no punches. It reports that the PC has "decided to hold a vote of no confidence against Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed Al-Awani if services did not improve during the course of the next month." That move is unprecedented in recent memory.

Governor Fires Back

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17. (C) Ma'amoun has been absent from Ramadi during these happenings; his reaction to the PC's threat is unknown. However on September 2 he shot off his own volley against the PC in a private meeting with the PRT leader. He expressed irritation that the PC had initiated a series of "investigations" into several DGs, describing the move as unreasonable because the PC summoned the DGs to appear at the council but the PC did not inform him. Ma'amoun argued that he should be present at any questioning of DGs because he is ultimately responsible for their performance. "The Council of Representatives would not investigate a ministry without informing the minister," he said. "Why does the PC act that way?"

18. (C) Ma'amoun is a blunt former civil engineer, who took over the chief executive's reins in June 2005 after his predecessor was kidnapped and killed. During the insurgency, he stubbornly held office hours at the fortified Government Center in Ramadi, the target of almost daily attacks, motivated no doubt by a deep sense of tribal honor that prevented him from abandoning his place of duty. Large parts of the provincial government, including the DGs and the PC itself, went underground or fled abroad or to safer parts of Iraq. Anbaris have long regarded Ma'amoun as having an imperious style with a proclivity to hold all meaningful power (budget execution, e.g.) close to himself.

Provincial Powers

19. (C) The source of the PC-Ma'amoun break is complex. Certainly one factor is the PC's self-image. As a body it sees itself as weak and dominated by a governor not given to sharing decision making. It has long been deferential to Ma'amoun, and its criticisms of him, at least until now, have been muted. Oddly, both the PC and the governor seem to be accusing each other of the same thing--that the other has overstepped its rightful authority to act or does not know the boundary of its authority. This has no doubt led to misunderstandings and the breakdown in communication. The country's statutes on provincial powers feed the recriminations. Since the existing provincial powers law

leaves unsettled many questions about the provincial executive and legislative power, and with the new law not yet in effect, a kind of statutory vacuum has appeared that is more readily filled by a strong-willed executive than by a weak and uncertain council.

Political Jockeying

¶10. (C) However, the rift goes deeper than interpretations of authority. It goes to the remarkable rise of the Iraq Awakening Conference, or Muatammar Sahwa Al-Iraq (MSI), which has transformed itself within two years from a collection of Ramadi-based tribal sheikhs determined to fight Al-Qaeda into a political party with national aspirations. Its presence on the local scene throws control of the PC in the next election up for grabs. Both the MSI and the IIP are eyeing election strategies. In this context, political jockeying is to be expected.

¶11. (C) Anbar's IIP leaders have long suspected that Ma'amoun has been playing political footsy with MSI chief Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha. This coziness would not have been possible 12 months ago, when Ma'amoun was frequently at odds with Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha, the founder of MSI's predecessor organization, and Ahmed's late brother. Today, however, there are indications that Ma'amoun has done his political arithmetic and has decided to hitch his wagon to MSI. At least that is the thinking of our IIP contacts.

Straws in the Wind

¶12. (C) One tip off is that MSI aims its public barbs at the PC and the IIP, but generally spares Ma'amoun. In other signals, the governor prominently sat Sheikh Ahmed in the place of honor at the September 1 ceremony in Ramadi for the provincial Iraqi control MOU signing and allowed him to make a public address, the only non-official to do so. After the MOU signing, Ma'amoun organized a visit to Baghdad to thank PM Maliki for his support on the transfer of the security file. He was accompanied not by provincial officials but by Sheikh Ahmed, the leader of the political opposition. The optic did not sit well with the IIP. When Ma'amoun unloaded on the PC in the meeting with the PRT leader on September 2, he paused long enough to point out that several of his cousins are married to Sheikh Ahmed's sisters. His intent was clear: he wanted to send a message to an outsider that he has strong ties to Ahmed.

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Comment

¶13. (C) How these Ramadi rumblings play out remains to be seen. The governor and PC leaders have yet to sit down to iron out their differences. But what may be evolving is a kind of limits-to-growth case study. During the insurgency, Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed "was" the provincial government. He was the only symbol of public authority on the scene; the PC scarcely met, never mind assumed any responsibility. Ma'amoun openly cooperated with the Coalition Forces, called them his friends, and provided the type of strong leadership necessary in a successful counter-insurgency strategy. But Anbar has entered into the period of post-conflict recovery. The public expects more effective delivery of essential services, and the PC must be responsive. It is searching for an assertive and meaningful role. It may conclude the person who did so much to defeat Al-Qaeda may not be the same person to lead the province in the period ahead. And it may gamble on boosting its electoral prospects in the process by disparaging Governor Ma'amoun. End Comment.
CROCKER